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OBSERVANCE OF GAME LAWS ESSENTIAL TO FUTURE HUNTING

W. C. Henderson, Associate Chief of Biological Survey
Explains Reasons for Reduction of Bag Limits

The only immediate relief that can be given the wild fowl of North America at the present time is to limit the kill by restrictions on the hunting season. Such limitation is one of three methods stated as available to insure the welfare of the migratory game birds of the country, by W. C. Henderson, associate chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture, in an address in Boston, Massachusetts, January 16 at the annual meeting of the Federation of the Bird Clubs of New England. Other methods are being followed, such as establishing breeding refuges in the North, so as to increase the production of the various species, and providing resting and feeding sanctuaries along migration routes and in wintering grounds of the birds in the Southern States, for some measure of protection during the hunting season, said Mr. Henderson. These two methods, however, will require a period of several years, but at present protection can be afforded only by reducing the annual kill, he said. This, he developed, can be accomplished both through necessary amendments to the present regulations and by more adequately enforcing the existing laws.

"While the difficulties of enforcement have greatly increased in the last ten years," said Mr. Henderson, "there has not been a proportionate strengthening of the enforcement arm to keep pace with the increased cost of patrolling and investigational work of the Federal game protectors. In spite of an inadequate force of protectors, however, their work has brought about many noticeable benefits.

"Studies made by the Biological Survey in the last three years indicate that wild fowl have not been holding their own, and that additional measures for their protection must be adopted if their numbers are to be maintained. This decrease is due in large measure," he said, "to drainage of wild-fowl concentration areas and limiting of the breeding grounds of birds by agricultural occupation, to the ease with which gunners can reach wild-fowl centers over improved roads and by use of automobiles and motor boats, and to the increasing effectiveness of devices used in hunting.

"It is inevitable that agriculture and human occupation will more and more encroach on the wild-fowl breeding areas. While we are awaiting the establishment of bird refuges, however, we can meet present emergencies by restrictions on hunting.

"The recent amendments to the regulations under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act affecting bag limits, which were made following recommendations of the Biological Survey, will lessen the kill on important winter concentration areas of the birds. During the coming hunting season the effect of the new amendments will be watched carefully by the Biological Survey. It is possible that additional restrictions may be found necessary to safeguard the birds--contingent upon the failure of these new regulations to accomplish the desired result. Among other methods that have received the consideration of the Biological Survey are: Shortening the open seasons, establishing rest days, making further

restrictions in the use of devices now allowed in the taking of ducks and geese, and limiting the artificial methods of bringing birds within range of the shooting stands.

"If additional changes should be recommended, the country may be assured that it will be only after the most careful attention to all phases of the situation. In recommending the most recent changes the Biological Survey was governed by this policy, and while extremists on both sides of the question are in many respects inclined to criticize the action taken, it should be borne in mind that it has been necessary for the bureau to proceed conservatively--not so rapidly as some would urge and yet more drastically than many opponents of hunting restrictions desire.

"The decision of the bureau to recommend the changes recently approved was based on facts carefully gathered and developed. At this time there is no other organization in the country in possession of as much information relating to wild-fowl conditions in North America as the Biological Survey.. . The opponents of the present regulations and others who are urging still more drastic restrictions can be in possession of only limited information by comparison. The Biological Survey, however, must be acquainted with all phases of the problem--phases that concern the food resources of wild fowl, their migratory habits, and their abundance, and other information that can be developed only from reports of agents of the bureau and other reliable observers widely distributed throughout North America.

"We need sound public sentiment in favor of the observance of the law, and willingness on the part of sportsmen and conservationists to adopt all the restrictions that are necessary to the preservation of the wild fowl," said Mr. Henderson.

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